

Grapes, Citrus Led to Covina's Growth

One-Time Citrus Capital

COVINA — "A mile square and all there" was for years the slogan of the largest city in the early days of the Valley. It's much bigger than that and not very square today.

In 1882, Joseph Phillips bought 2,000 acres of land from John Hollenbeck, an early Valley pioneer. In 1885 he began selling 10-acre tracts. Phillips' surveyor, Fred Eaton, is credited with originating the town-to-be's name. The area was covered with vineyards and to Eaton it looked like a "cove of vines" — from which came the name Covina.

The first permanent structure was erected in 1886 and a small town rapidly grew up around it. Covina's growth was given a boost by the Church of the Brethren, which purchased land from Phillips and established their first California church there. The original chapel stood until 1972.

Water is vital to any new town and stories tell of gunfights between Covinans and Azusans over early water rights.

Phillips didn't fare as well as his city. He lost all he made in Covina on a gold mine investment in Northern California.

Like other Valley cities, Covina was a center of agriculture. In the early part of this century it laid claim to the title of citrus capital of California. As late as 1953, Covina had only 5,000 residents — about one-sixth the present total.